

The Christian News-Letter

No. 334

edited by
ATHLEEN
LISS

30th March, 1949

THE EVANGELICAL PASTORS who have been on trial in Bulgaria have made the now familiar and expected confessions of guilt. Some of the confessions relate to supposed dealings with agents of H.M. Government who, in point of fact, were in other parts of the world at the time; others relate to visits of representatives of the Reconstruction Department of the World Council of Churches which had to do entirely with questions of relief to churches in Bulgaria.

NEWS-LETTER

THE CONTROL OF MEN'S
SOULS

RATIONAL MORALITIES

SUPPLEMENT

THE RELIGION OF BEATRICE
WEBB

By

MARY STOCKS

To get what is happening in its right perspective it is necessary for a moment to detach it from Communism. It is idle to speculate on the precise means used in different cases to bring about a uniform result. There seems to be little evidence of physical torture: threats to families may have been used. Drugs may or may not play a part, and it has been suggested and again denied by competent authorities that confessions can be extracted as the result of hypnotism. Far more prominent are the varied and elaborate devices for ringing about complete physical and mental exhaustion and for breaking down the victim's grasp on his own case by suggesting a whole range of "reasons" why he believed and acted as he did, and thereby convincing him that he did not previously know himself. All this requires a deep knowledge of the workings of the human mind and personality, and this knowledge comes not from Communism but from the immense strides made in medical and psycho-

logical knowledge in recent years. A reader of the News-Letter who is a practising psychiatrist writes: "The nearest analogy in our recent history to the state of mind of the confessors at these trials is, I think, battle exhaustion or 'bomb happiness' as it was sometimes described. Anyone who is not convinced by this—and it does sound rather doubtful—should re-read Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, where the state of mind of such confessors is uncannily portrayed." The knowledge of the nature and effects of mental exhaustion and shock which in the war was used to save numbers of men from permanent mental injury, can be used by unscrupulous men not to remove injury but to inflict it. Similarly the study of the human mind, which has set many a mental sufferer free by laying bare the hidden reasons for his irrational actions and fears, can be used to create a sense of psychological instability and moral bewilderment.

Whatever the means used, results are patent for all to see. Men say things and assume a bearing wholly out of keeping with their previous character and known past. They have undergone a change of personality. From the Christian point of view this is far more serious than the use of physical torture. The Christian martyr was able to preserve his soul. But now the citadel of man's self may be subdued and the inner core of his personality destroyed. This new knowledge not only places a weapon of unprecedented horror in the hands of the masters of the state, but, as Dr. Desmond Pond pointed out not long ago in a Supplement (C.N.I. No. 317), gives rise to many problems of conscience for the practising physician. The dangerous illusion that scientific knowledge and techniques, especially in the field of medicine, are by their very nature beneficial to mankind, has prevented many from seeing that the bulwark between this knowledge and its destructive use was not in the knowledge itself but in the individual consciences, the corporate discipline, the professional ethical standards of the men and groups of men to whom this knowledge came. "In itself," said Lord Russell in one of his recent Reith lectures,¹ speaking of science: "

¹ *The Listener*, 13th January, 1949.

is neutral, neither good nor bad, and any ultimate views we may have about what gives value to this or that must come from some other source than science". This is more readily believed of other branches of science than it is of medicine or psychology.

These new powers over men's behaviour and personality are made the more dangerous because they are let loose on a world from which inhibitions about their use are being swept away by new doctrines. While the phenomenon we are considering must not, as was said earlier, be identified with Communism, there is of course the closest relation between them. The doctrine that for certain ends everything is permissible is not peculiar to Communism, but it is a foundation stone of its teaching. Stalin in his volume on *Leninism* quotes Lenin as saying that "the scientific concept of dictatorship means nothing more nor less than unrestricted power, *absolutely unimpeded by laws or regulations* and resting directly on force".¹ Elsewhere Lenin writes that "we must be ready to employ trickery, deceit, law-breaking, withholding and concealing truth".² To put these declarations in their right setting we have to remember, first, that they are the convictions of men who in many instances are in their personal lives utterly dedicated to a cause which they believe to be for the ultimate benefit of mankind; and, secondly, that the moral code which they express is also the moral code of war, when war becomes an all-out struggle with no holds barred.

The use by communists, for their own ends, of modern knowledge of psychology is not restricted to the small number of skilled interrogators who operate at trials. It has become part of the stock-in-trade of the communist organizer anywhere in the world. The Report of the Royal Commission set up in Canada in 1946 to investigate the elaborate espionage network through which valuable information was being passed to Russia, contains an interesting account of how a large number of persons, nearly all of whom were highly educated men and women in posts of

¹ Stalin. *Problems of Leninism*, p. 134.

² Lenin. *The Infantile Disease of Leftism*.

responsibility, were led into spying activities which involved them in setting aside oaths of allegiance, of office and of secrecy. "The evidence before us," says the Report, "shows that in the great majority of cases the motivation was inextricably linked with courses of psychological development carried on under the guise of activities of a secret section of the Labour-Progressive Party (Communist Party of Canada); and that these secret 'development' courses are very much more widespread than the espionage network itself."

The technique was as follows. Reliable communists, many of whom were discouraged from joining the official party, were told to start small secret study groups among "students, scientific workers, teachers, office and business workers, persons engaged in any type of administrative activity, and any group likely to obtain any type of Government employment". The group would set out to study such matters as the differences between Socialism and Communism, or international affairs. Recruits would be drawn from among those who in personal conversation betrayed any grudge against society, any leftist leanings, or reforming zeal. The ultimate object of the group, the Report says, was "to accustom the young Canadian adherent gradually to an atmosphere and ethic of conspiracy. The technique seems calculated to develop the psychology of a double life and double standards. An inevitable result of this emphasis on a conspiratorial atmosphere and behaviour even in political discussions, which are in themselves perfectly legal, would seem to be the gradual disintegration of normal moral principles such as frankness, honesty, integrity, and a respect for the sanctity of oaths." The object of the curriculum was to develop in the members of the group a critical attitude towards Western democratic society and to promote a sense of internationalism of a subjective kind which would help to weaken the loyalty of the group member towards his or her own society. "This subjective internationalism," the Report continues, "is then usually linked almost inextricably through the indoctrination courses with the current conception of the national interests of a particular foreign state and with the current doctrines and policies of communist

parties throughout the world." This, says the Commission, explained why an eminent scientist, Professor Boyer, gave secret information despite his oath of secrecy, "believing that this step would further 'international scientific collaboration'". This elaborate technique, known by the communists as "psychological development", had been going on in Canada for more than ten years before the espionage network was uncovered. At bottom it was constructed on the moral confusion, the conflict of loyalties, the lack of adventure and purposiveness pervading society.

From the opposite side of the world another example may be quoted of a complete abandonment of moral value under the influence of Communism. An Indian Christian student, who became a communist, accepted it in its full ruthlessness. He fomented a strike in a Christian college and wrote as follows to one of the strike leaders: "Capture and paralyse your institution and stop its normal functioning. Show no leniency towards the bogus religion of your college or the slave power of your state. Let no rules, morals and principles of the present society deter us. Without counting the costs leap into darkness, into the bottomless pit."

RATIONAL MORALITIES

The gravity of the human predicament is patent to all who look beneath the surface of things, non-Christians as well as Christians. It is not surprising that serious attempts should be made by those who have abandoned religious belief to provide rational foundations for a new morality. Two such contributions have been published in the past few weeks. The one is entitled *Man for Himself*,¹ by Dr. Erich Fromm, an American psychiatrist, already known by his book, *Fear of Freedom*; the other is *Ethics for Unbelievers*,¹ by Amber Blanco-White, Lecturer in Moral Science at Morley College.

In both books the concern of the writers for the fate of humanity is manifest. As Mrs. Blanco-White puts it, unless the human race can change its accustomed behaviour, its future will be unpleasant and possibly short, and there can

¹ Routledge and Kegan Paul, 12s. 6d.

seldom have been a time when there was greater need for thought on ethical problems. Dr. Fromm is convinced that men cannot live without values and norms. The experience of his consulting room has taught him that in many instances neurotic symptoms are the expression of a moral conflict and that an understanding and solution of it is necessary for a cure. In opposition to the tendencies of a naturalistic psychology which puts all desires on the same level and reduces moral choices to differences of taste, he insists that objectively valid norms are indispensable.

Both writers are none the less firmly convinced that the moral code that is so urgently needed must be independent of religious beliefs and supernatural sanctions. The only alternative is that it should be founded on our growing knowledge of man. The crucial question is whether science can provide that foundation. Both writers believe that it can. What they say about the contribution of modern knowledge to the healthy growth of personality is buttressed by an impressive body of practical experience.

Their reasons for demanding a morality divorced from religious beliefs and sanctions are, first, the practical reason that in the existing diversity of religious beliefs and widespread abandonment of religious faith of any kind, a moral code that is to meet with common acceptance must stand on its own feet.

Secondly, there is a genuine dissatisfaction with existing moral systems, none of which, in the view of Mrs. Blanco-White, "possess either the certainty, the clarity, or the consistency" which their adherents claim. It is important that Christians should realize that whereas up to the present the Christian apologetic has been concerned mainly with the defence of Christian doctrine, it is to-day the Christian ethic that has become a stumbling-block to many thoughtful people. Mrs. Blanco-White says explicitly that "it is precisely because the return to a religious system of belief involves the acceptance of the Church's outlook on morals that the way of return is barred to many minds".

Thirdly, one can detect throughout both volumes the reaction characteristic of the modern mind against anything

that looks like bare and unsupported assertion, in contrast with painstaking investigation of the facts. John Dewey is quoted in denunciation of the tendency to appeal to "some voice so authoritative as to preclude the need of enquiry". "Let us put our backs into it and find out the truth" is the modern temper, with which Christians have to reckon.

Some of our readers will have listened to the six broadcasts in the Home Service of a discussion between Professor Hodges and Vernon Mallinson on the question "Can Christianity satisfy the need of modern man for a faith to live by?" They will recall that in the course of the discussion Professor Hodges said: "The question really is this. Is it true that God is dead or dying, or is it the idols that are getting smashed, so that the real God may be revealed to us?" The question to be asked about the two books that have been mentioned is whether what they are attacking is God or the idols. In part it is certainly the latter. The writers are exposing weaknesses in the current presentation of Christianity which must be overcome, if the Church is to do its job properly. They provide knowledge which can broaden and re-enforce Christian ethical teaching. What may at first sight look like hostile criticism may turn out to be a liberation.

In the last broadcast of the series that has been referred to both speakers agreed that there can be an irrevocable decision which is not incompatible with an openness of mind, and that the effort to understand one another in the discussion had led each of the participants to a deeper understanding of his own position. This seemed to them an experience of such value that they concluded the long discussion by considering how this kind of free enquiry could be spread more widely. We have already emphasized in the Christian News-Letter the importance of bringing about conversations between Churchmen and scientists. There is an equal need to find common talking-points between those who with widely different pre-suppositions have a common concern about the ethical problems of contemporary society. A discussion between open-minded Christians and those who approach these problems from the standpoint of Dr. Fromm

and Mrs. Blanco-White would probably reveal a surprisingly large amount of common ground, and each side might gain unexpected benefit from the interchange.

In such conversations Christians will have much to learn, but there are also questions which they will want to press home in the discussion. Three such questions are suggested by the books under review.

In the first place, neither of the writers seems to take sufficient account of the element of *frustration* in human life by which man's best intentions are brought to defeat and human plans are turned into the opposite of what was intended. This is a fact of experience which has been recognized by non-Christian as well as Christian thinkers.

Again, the writers of these books do not come to real grips with the fact that it is a sick society that is expected to cure itself. The Christian need have no difficulty in accepting and welcoming the results that are claimed for scientific therapy. God wills the health of His creation, and there is no more reason for questioning that there is a wide field for the fruitful exercise of human skill in what is hideously called "characterology" than for calling in question the beneficial results of medical science. But this takes us only part of the way. Let us admit to the full everything that can be done by skilled scientific treatment and wise education to develop what Dr. Fromm calls the "productive" personality—we have still to reckon with the counter forces at work in society as a whole. The hoarding and the exploiting orientations—to keep to Dr. Fromm's vocabulary—are far more common than the "productive". It is with such diseased personalities that each new generation is brought into contact and infected with the same defects. We need no reminder that perverted natures like that of Hitler can find their way into the seat of power and spread infection throughout a whole people. Christians can bring to the suggested conversations a more realistic perception of the reality, the dominion and ubiquity of evil than is evident in these books.

Thirdly, the discussion has to be pressed to a more fundamental examination of the position that the question of God

irrelevant to a discussion of ethics. The efforts of these writers to destroy the idols that have been set up in the place of God are all to the good. Professor Hodges in the broadest discussions spoke of the image of the arbitrary father which is too often implanted in the child's unconscious and then transferred to God. This false picture of a false God has too often been sold to the world and even to the Church of Christianity. For all that the scientists can do to destroy such images we can be nothing but grateful. But when that has been done, why should it be thought other than good and joyful news that in his search for moral wholeness and desire for spiritual growth man is not engaged in the desperate task of imposing his puny notions on an indifferent and recalcitrant universe, but is reaching out to a truth and beauty that are the stuff of reality and responding to a divine initiative and encompassing love?

A further question has also to be pressed home, which is really another aspect of the same question. The moral progress of mankind depends on the hard fighting and sacrificial living of individuals and small groups who have acted as pioneers. Why have they stood out against mockery, derision, persecution and death? Not because they thought their way of life would hold society together more successfully than prevailing norms of behaviour, but because they believed it was *truth*, that it belonged to the underlying nature of things, and therefore had the force of a divine imperative upon their lives. It is interesting to notice that in the Reith lectures already quoted Lord Russell, an agnostic scientist, returns more than once to the unique importance of the religious teacher, the mystic and the moral pioneer in history, and sees no substitute for that office emerging to-day from the ranks of those who have abandoned a conception of transcendent obligation.

THE SUPPLEMENT

Mrs. Mary Stocks, Principal of Westfield College, London University, and a long-standing member of the Editorial Board of the C.N-L., needs no introduction to our readers. She shows in her Supplement what were hidden sources of strength in the life of a woman of towering

intellect who kept up over a long lifetime a ceaseless output of work at a high intellectual level, in spite of indifferent health. Her sensitive description of the mind of Beatrice Webb is relevant to the matters which have been under discussion in this News-Letter. Beatrice Webb performed her life work in an atmosphere filled with hope about the future and faith in man: the struggle was hard, but it was worth while. The desperate men prepared, like the young Indian communist, to leap into the darkest pit, wrecking and destroying, hardly made their presence known. The picture of the praying agnostic is a standing rebuke to the un-praying Christian, and one suspects that a census of Christians at their prayers, as she so often was, for an hour before the beginning of a hard day, would show a poor return. Yet the times in which we live, if nothing else, throw us Christians back on the need for a prayer which is not just asking for help in our problems and strength in our duties, but prayer for this world as it is, offered in and through Christ who truly loved it.

THE ECUMENICAL REVIEW

The World Council of Churches now publishes a quarterly journal with this name, and we would like to commend it to our readers. It is published (so far in English only) in Geneva, and is obtainable in this country from the London office of the World Council of Churches, 5 St. Martin's Place, London, W.C. 2, price 12s. per annum. The *Review* contains theological discussions of problems of the ecumenical movement and of Christian reunion, articles from different countries on the progress of understanding between the Churches, and articles on some of the great questions which confront the Churches as a whole in the modern world. A section called "Ecumenical Chronicle" summarizes important statements from different countries on such matters as schemes for reunion, religious toleration, relations with the Roman Catholic Church and with others outside the ecumenical movement. The *Review* ought to be on the shelves of everyone who wants to make a close and thorough study of the ecumenical movement, for it is an invaluable work of reference.

Kathleen Bliss

THE RELIGION OF BEATRICE WEBB

By MARY STOCKS

THE publication last year of *Our Partnership*,¹ which after a long interval follows that of *My Apprenticeship*, completes the biography of Mrs. Sidney Webb. Composed mainly of contemporary diaries, it offers to the social and political historian a penetrating commentary on persons and events during the long stretch of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's married life. But it is scarcely less valuable to persons wholly uninterested in Edwardian social life, the evolution of the L.C.C., the birth of the London School of Economics, the era of Liberal social reform, the genesis of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the reform of the Poor Law. For seldom has a more self-revealing human document been offered to the world by a profoundly significant personality. *My Apprenticeship* left Beatrice Webb with a sub-stratum of religious faith which had, after a period of anguished self-analysis under the impact of late Victorian agnosticism, survived the rejection of dogmatic Christianity. One might at that point have been tempted to regard it as a phase of passing emotionalism and bewilderment, unlikely to survive the satisfaction of a happy marriage and half a lifetime of fruitful activity. It did survive. It even survived the cool unconcern of Sidney Webb who cared for none of these things, but with whom Beatrice lived for fifty-three years till death did them part, whose mental processes she shared and venerated and whom she passionately loved.

Writing in the Christian News-Letter of 19th January, 1949, Alex Comfort indicates and criticizes three approaches to the evidential basis of Christian belief: "a body of historical testimony which is not fully convincing, a body of revelation which seems synonymous with intuitive assertion, and a body of

¹ *Our Partnership* by Beatrice Webb. Edited by Barbara Drake and Margaret Cole. (Longmans, 25s.)

mystical experience". Of these, he considers that "the last is by far the most hopeful as a basis for true conclusions because it does at least offer, however uncritically, an experimental approach to spiritual reality from which the objective existence of such a reality might be studied". It was doubtless this experimental approach that the late Professor Graham Wallas was seeking, after being dismissed from a teaching post for non-compliance with Christian practice—to a ribald chorus of: "Old daddy long-legs wouldn't say his prayers; they took him by the left leg and threw him down the stairs". There are still old students of the School of Economics who will remember him coming up to tea in what was then a small intimate refectory, with puzzled brow and tousled hair, sitting down among a group of them and saying, as though resuming a philosophical discussion with intellectual equals, that he didn't know what to make of "sacramental experience". He was assured that it was an overwhelming reality. He was prepared to accept that. But by what mental process could one deduce from its existence the assertions of dogmatic Christianity? Nobody at that table at that time could produce an answer to his question and it is probable that Wallas himself never achieved one.

FAITH WITHOUT ASSERTION

Certainly Beatrice Webb never did. But though William Temple in one of his less discerning moments found her unexplained "feeling" for the atmosphere of St. Paul's somewhat ridiculous, and though H. G. Wells remarked that she had "about as much mysticism as a tin whistle", and though she was wont to describe herself as an agnostic and indeed never bridged the gap between mystical apprehension of the numinous and dogmatic assertion, she did achieve a religious interpretation of the universe which satisfied and upheld her, which enabled her to seek continuous guidance in prayer and which produced, without compromising her intellectual integrity, a synthesis between the processes and the purpose of life. Her own confession of faith involved a simple formula which she expressed from time to time in her diaries, in her book on *Methods of Social Study*, and in a lecture entitled *The Bankruptcy of Science* which

bought to a close one of the earliest courses of those autumn
bian lectures which were among the intellectual treats of late
wardian London. It is perhaps best stated in the concluding
ragraphs of her chapter on "Observation and Experiment"
My Apprenticeship. After asserting her "ever-deepening con-
tion of the supreme value, in all social activity, of the scientific
ethod" she continues:—

" 'This ceaseless questioning of social facts', the Ego that
nies was always insisting, 'seems an interesting way of passing
e time, but does it lead anywhere?'

" 'The Ego that affirms could now answer with confidence :
eeing that society is one vast laboratory in which experiments
human relationships, conscious or unconscious, careless or
liberate, are continuously being carried on, those races will
rvive and prosper which are equipped with the knowledge of
ow things happen. And this knowledge can only be acquired
persistent research into the past and present behaviour of man.'

" 'How things happen!' mocks the Ego that denies, 'but
at does not settle what *ought* to happen.'

" 'I thought I told you long ago', calmly answers the Ego
at affirms, 'that with regard to the purpose of life, science is,
ad must remain, bankrupt; and the men of science of to-day
now it. The goal towards which we strive, the state of mind
ourselves and in the community that we wish to bring about,
depends on a human scale of values, a scale of values which alters
om race to race, from generation to generation, and from
individual to individual. How each of us determines our scale
f values no one knows. For my own part, I find it best to live
as if" the soul of man were in communion with a super-
uman force which makes for righteousness. Like our under-
standing of nature through observation and reasoning, this
ommunion with the spirit of love at work in the universe will
e intermittent and incomplete and it will frequently fail us. But
failure to know and a fall from grace is the way of all flesh'."

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

Such was the faith that survived. It is not perhaps a very original or unusual profession. Doubtless it derives some of its interest from the fact that many of those who did not know Beatrice Webb very well, chose to envisage her as an uncommon promising rationalist with a distinguished but hard precise mind. But its real interest lies in the fact that what Temple regarded as a nebulous unsatisfying mysticism did in fact serve her, as repeated entries in her later diaries show, as the starting point for prayer. She was a past-mistress in the selection of telling and relevant evidence for the support of a scholarly thesis or an administrative plan, and she was not prepared to construct religious beliefs on any basis which she regarded as not good enough for less important conclusions. She was in fact proceeding a little way—very cautiously—along the road indicated by Alex Comfort in his admission that mystical experience may serve as a hopeful “basis for true conclusions, because it does at least offer, however uncritically, an experimental approach to spiritual reality. . . .” Beatrice Webb’s hypothesis of “a superhuman force which makes for righteousness” was tested by response to prayer—tested and, as she assures us over and over again in *Our Partnership*, not found wanting.

“Looking back on those autumn months”, she writes after the gruelling contest of the 1909 Poor Law Commission, “I wonder how I managed to come through it—it was sheer will-power induced by prayer. Every morning I trudged out between 6.30 and 7.30—an hour of sharp physical exercise combined with intense prayer for help to solve the problem before us And solutions *did* come to me in those morning walks. How they came I do not know” She frequently writes thus. Sometimes her praying is done in St. Paul’s. Sometimes to the music of Evensong in Westminster Abbey. Always it strengthens and satisfies. Yet she continues to describe herself as an “agnostic” and there is no reason to suppose that she revised her earlier rejection of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement on the ground that it was not so much irrational as immoral. Beyond her evidence she would not go.

This preoccupation with the springs of religious faith enters largely into her commentaries on other people. She is perpetually interested in whether or no they are religious, a little sorrowful and at times sharply critical if they are not. She attributes to her old friend Marie Souvestre, the brilliant headmistress of Allenswood School, "an amazing narrowness of vision for so intelligent a person; a total inability to understand religion". Many of her Fabian contemporaries and their younger successors fell far short. They were sound enough on the scientific method but they were not religious. Haldane was more hopeful. Here she found "a passion for deducing from given premises first principles, justifying an emotional faith in the vital as against the mechanistic interpretation of the behaviour of man". He believed in the spiritual interpretation of the universe". But she was not prepared to go as far as Beatrice, to judge from an awkward passage at dinner in which his sister Elizabeth Haldane was engaged. "A curious little episode at this dinner. The conversation drifted on to religious teaching in secondary schools and I casually remarked that I liked a definitely religious atmosphere and the practice of prayer as part of the school life. Nonsense—Mrs. Webb', blurted out the usually calm Elizabeth, with a sort of insinuation in her voice that I was not sincere. I stood up and maintained my ground; and, in a moment of intimacy, asserted that prayer was a big part of my own life. Whereupon both the Haldanes turned round and openly scoffed at me, Haldane beginning a queer kind of cross-examination in law-court fashion as to what exactly I prayed to, or prayed about, and Elizabeth scornfully remarking that prayer was mere superstition. It was a strange outburst, met by another outburst from me that the two big forces for good in the world were the scientific method applied to the process of life, and the use of prayer in directing the purpose of life." Seldom perhaps have religious faith and the scientific method commanded so passionate allegiance in one and the same person. But in Sidney she had to be contented with the scientific method—and, Sidney being Sidney, she was.

Many years ago a young student from the London School of Economics waited impatiently for the final lecture entitled

The Bankruptcy of Science in the course which Sidney and Beatrice Webb were giving alternately—because in spite of a year's cultivation of the scientific method as applied to social phenomena it did seem to him that science was not wholly solvent. The over-simplified formula offered by Beatrice Webb came to him as a revelation. A social philosophy seemed to click neatly into place in its framework of reality. If an intellectual giant of that stature was prepared to take the leap into faith he was prepared to follow on the terms indicated, carrying with him untarnished by intellectual compromise the veneration for the scientific method which he had so recently and so disturbingly acquired. He had not expected to encounter a flame of religious inspiration on a Fabian lecture platform and he walked home in a glow of exultation.

Not all young Fabians were similarly impressed, and many years later, when Beatrice Webb celebrated her eightieth birthday at lunch in the School of Economics Senior Common Room, she was moved to an expression of affectionate maternal reproach, for most of those present had grown to middle age under Webbian influence. "I wonder what you all believe in", she said, and added, "I know you're none of you religious".

Subscriptions—£1 (\$4.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, 10s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies, 10d.; reduction for quantities.

Indices—Vols. I—XIII (Oct. 1939—Dec. 1948), 1s. each post free.

Folders—To hold six months' supply, 3s. each post free.

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Bound Volumes—Vols. II—XII (May 1940—Dec. 1947) 15s. each post free, or 12s. 6d. each in sets of four or more consecutive volumes.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20 BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W. 1

Published by the Christian Frontier Trust, Ltd., and printed in Great Britain
by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.